

III. Recreational Activities and Water Supply

The Metropolitan District Commission Division of Watershed Management must carefully weigh the potential for impacts to the drinking water supply and other environmental resources before considering any uses on its properties. In general, any human use will cause impacts. The job for MDC/DWM is to determine what uses may be allowed in which areas in order to limit potential water quality impacts to acceptable levels. Because the Division purchases and maintains its lands for water supply protection, it must err on the side of caution in identifying uses that compromise water supply protection. MDC/DWM must consider:

- 💧 type and intensity of proposed public access use;
- 💧 the physical features of the area being considered for public activities;
- 💧 the potential for impacts to water quality from the entire spectrum of visitors; and
- 💧 the resource needs to properly manage any particular use on its properties, always mindful of the primary mission of the Division – water supply protection.

The criteria to determine whether an activity is compatible with the Division's water supply mission identifies whether the activity has the potential to degrade the quality of water in the watershed or to degrade any natural resource within the watershed. MDC/DWM must consider the following information in making such a determination:

- 💧 Division of Watershed Management goals, and guiding legislation and regulations.
- 💧 Environmental impacts to water quality and land resources
- 💧 Potential for impacts to watershed resources and waterworks infrastructure
- 💧 Potential impacts to staffing and other resources.
- 💧 The safety of users, abutters, staff, and general public safety.

The sections that follow discuss numerous recreation activities and evaluate them using the criteria outlined above. Unless noted otherwise, 350 CMR 11.09(2) are the regulations that the MDC administers concerning public access on Division of Watershed Management property. As stated previously, because the Division purchases and maintains its lands for drinking water supply protection, it must err on the side of caution in restricting or prohibiting uses that may be incompatible with drinking water supply protection.

A. Water Contact Activities

Direct water contact activities, such as swimming and wading, pose an established threat to the water supply and to public safety. These activities are prohibited by regulation. The link between water contact activities and the spread of water-borne disease is well-documented. Although the Sudbury Reservoir watershed South Basin (Reservoirs Nos. 1 and 2, Sudbury River, and Cedar Swamp) is no longer used for water supply, activities in areas downstream of the Nyanza site are not appropriate because of potential health hazards. In addition, limited MDC land ownership, resource limitations and proper public safety considerations make water contact activities inappropriate for these areas.

B. Boating (Motorized and Non-motorized)

All boating activities, both motorized and non-motorized, are prohibited by current regulations, except in areas specifically designated by the Commission. Although boating does not require water contact, this contact nevertheless frequently occurs with these activities. Boating poses less of a threat to the water supply than swimming, but is still considered an unnecessary threat to a water supply. In the South Basin, where the water is not used as a drinking water source, the major concern is for public safety. Boating on the reservoirs would require a managed program to protect public safety. Managing these activities would divert MDC resources from programs directly linked with water supply protection. The one exception for boating in the South Basin is MDC-designated canoe access to the Sudbury River in the Cedar Swamp area.

C. Fishing

Shoreline fishing is currently allowed in the northern portions of the Sudbury Reservoir, with a fishing season that runs from April 1st until November 30th each year. Shoreline fishing, without water contact, in certain areas, and for a limited period of time, does not pose a significant threat to the water supply or other natural resources. Shoreline fishing in other areas of the Sudbury Reservoir and watershed will be allowed where appropriate access can be gained and public safety concerns are not significant.

D. Off-Road Driving (Off-Road Vehicles (ORVs), All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs))

This recreational activity has been prohibited by regulation on all MDC/DWM lands in all of its watersheds since 1989. This prohibition is based on significant documentation of the erosion impacts associated with ORV and ATV use, and observations of these effects on non-MDC lands on the Ware River watershed. Given the limited MDC ownership in the Sudbury watersheds, control of potentially damaging uses on that land is critical. The prohibition of these activities on MDC lands in the Sudbury System is not likely to change.

E. Horseback Riding

Horseback riding is prohibited by regulation on all MDC watershed lands, except in designated areas, which are limited and contained within the Ware River watershed. Horseback riding is extremely limited due to the threat of fecal coliform contamination and the potential of other pathogens associated with domestic animal manures, as well as the increased potential for erosion of access roads.

The relatively small amount of MDC/DWM property in the Sudbury System does not allow for trails to be located in an appropriate manner to adequately protect water quality. The

additional road maintenance required to mitigate erosion impacts from horseback riding would further compromise the limited resources available to the Division for watershed protection.

F. Dogs and Other Pets

Bringing any animal onto MDC watershed lands is prohibited by regulation except where horses and dogs are authorized access at limited areas of the Ware River watershed (350 CMR 11.00). Dogs and other domestic animals can carry *Giardia* and *Cryptosporidium*; these parasites can spread to wildlife populations and ultimately into the water supply.

G. Camping

Camping is prohibited by regulation; however, this illegal activity does occur on MDC owned lands in the Sudbury reservoir's watershed. Camping tends to generate larger amounts of trash than hiking and walking. In addition, camping creates human sanitation problems. There are serious water quality concerns associated with deposition of human fecal matter close to tributaries and reservoirs.

Given the lack of sanitary facilities and the significant needs of resource allocation for administration, maintenance, and enforcement, the MDC considers camping inappropriate and it will continue to remain an unauthorized activity in the Sudbury Reservoir watershed.

H. Hunting and Trapping

MDC regulations prohibit hunting and trapping except at times and in areas designated by MDC. Hunting and trapping are not currently allowed on MDC lands in the Sudbury Reservoir watershed. Illegal poaching does occur on several areas of the watershed, such as Sudbury Reservoir and Crane Swamp. Hunting within Sudbury may be considered a potential threat to public safety due to the high human population density surrounding the scattered land holdings of the Division.

MDC is not proposing to change the status of this activity on its lands in the Sudbury System.

I. Hiking, Nature Study, Bird Watching, Snowshoeing

Hiking, walking, nature study, bird watching, and snowshoeing are currently allowed in designated areas surrounding Crane's Swamp and the Sudbury Reservoir. Hiking has relatively minor impact to water quality, unless those walking bring along dogs (see above). Walking on the surface of the Reservoirs when frozen is strictly forbidden. MDC land holdings within the Sudbury Reservoir watershed are surrounded by various

parcels of public and private open space. Several groups have expressed interest in connecting adjacent open space areas to MDC lands (for example, the Bay Circuit Trail and a Sudbury River Canoe Corridor). Providing trail connections to adjacent open space areas will be incorporated into the recommendations in Section V, where appropriate. Areas where access must be limited in order to adequately protect water supply and other watershed resources will not be opened to provide trail connections.

J. Bicycle Riding

Regulations restrict bicycle riding to designated areas of MDC/DWM property. The intensive use of trails for biking, if not properly constructed or maintained on a regular basis, can cause severe erosion. Excessive soil erosion has been documented on MDC's metropolitan Boston Reservations where mountain bicycle use occurs. Heavy bicycle usage can also be incompatible with walking and nature observation. Additional policing is needed to monitor both permitted bicycling and illegal off-trail riding, and to prevent erosion. Due to limited resources for management of public access, recreational use, and user conflicts, MDC is not in favor of adding designated areas for bicycle use on MDC/DWM lands in the Sudbury System.

K. Cross-Country Skiing

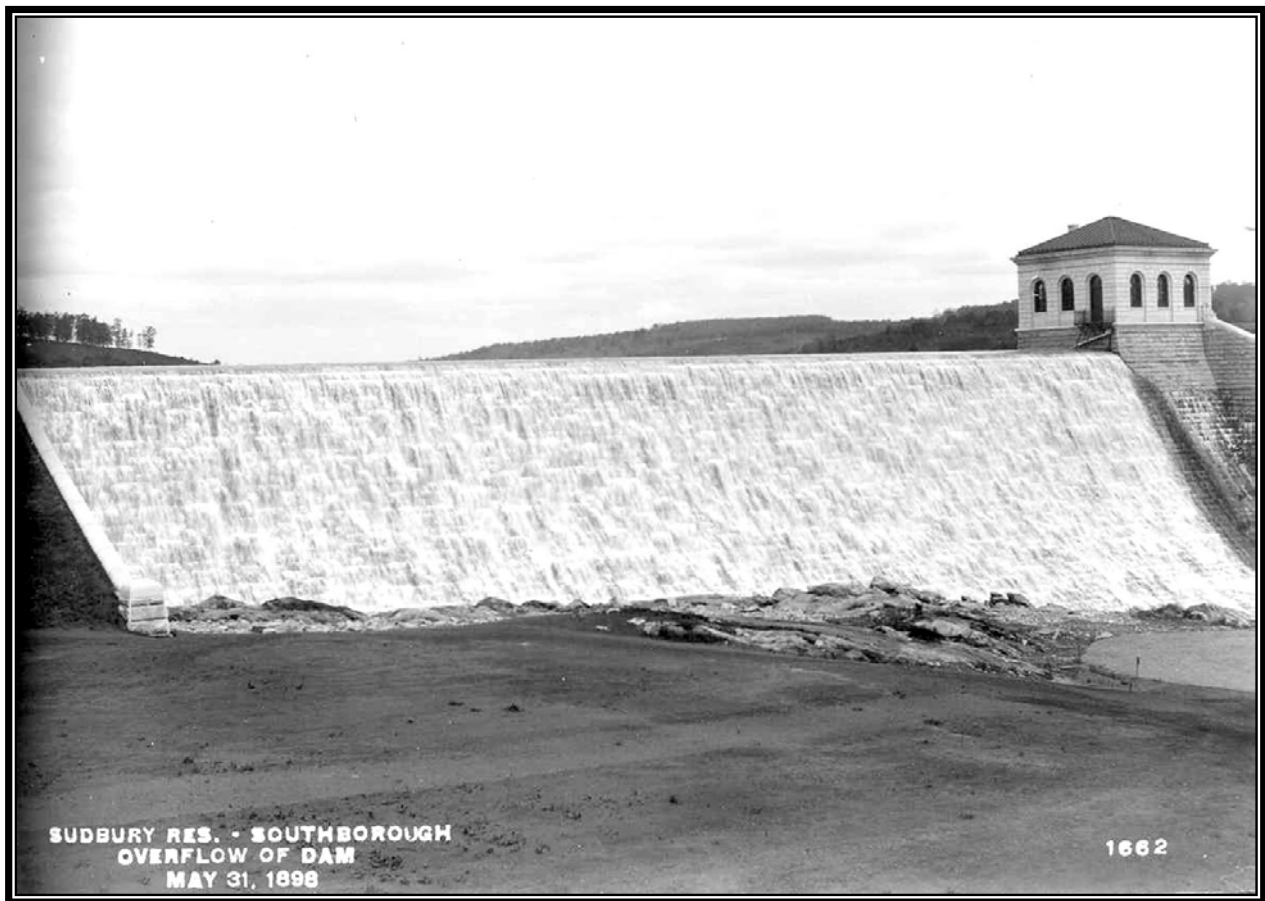
Limited skiing presently occurs on the Sudbury Reservoir watershed. This activity is currently allowed along the existing MDC fire road located between Parmenter Road and the intersection of Nichols and Clemons Streets in Marlborough, as well as on the MDC trail that will connect the Sudbury Reservoir to Callahan State Park. One concern in expanding cross-country skiing is that by increasing an activity that has been allowed only on a limited area, MDC will be attracting additional usage to the watershed like that which has been documented near the Blue Hill Reservation. Therefore, the MDC will allow cross-county skiing on a trial basis at the Sudbury Reservoir. Skiing will be allowed in all areas that are open for hiking. Skiing is prohibited over the reservoir's frozen surface. This activity will be monitored to evaluate potential impacts on watershed resources and then will be reviewed to determine its appropriateness as an authorized recreational activity.

L. Picnicking

MDC regulations do not prohibit picnicking on Sudbury Reservoir watershed lands. Since picnicking is an ambiguous term, it should be noted that MDC's regulations prohibit the use of fire, any cooking activity, and alcoholic beverages on all watershed lands under the care and control of the MDC. All trash from picnic activity is the sole responsibility of the individual(s) involved and cannot be left on MDC property. There are currently no sanitation facilities on MDC lands in the Sudbury System.

M. Other Activities

The activities presented in this section and in Table 3 are not an extensive inventory of recreational activities, rather they are the most common outdoor pursuits and/or those that may present the most serious harm to water quality. All activities that are permitted by the MDC are identified in this plan. Any activity not mentioned in this document should be presumed to be prohibited on MDC/DWM property in the Sudbury System. Questions concerning an activity not cited in this plan should be directed to the Wachusett/Sudbury Watershed Rangers at (978) 365-3800.



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